New Year’s is perhaps the most festive and widely celebrated of all the holidays in Russia. Merriments include children’s parties and recitals, masquerades, caroling, and a speech given by the head of government on the nation’s achievements.

Following the Russian revolution in 1917, Christmas and New Year celebrations were discouraged as symbols of the greed of the bourgeois. The tradition of celebrating Novy God (New Year) reappeared in 1935 as a secular holiday that symbolized the prosperity of the Soviet Union and the happiness of its children. The New Year’s tree was repurposed as the main symbol of the celebration but with all religious references removed.

The Red Army’s ruby star replaced the star of Bethlehem on top and the tree bore with non-religious shaped ornaments such as baubles, critters, Kremlin architecture, and the hammer and sickle. Soviet Russian ornaments were created in a simple, ‘folksy’ style with a lot of whimsy and bold color. Motifs drew from fairy tales, peasant folk traditions, family life, and symbols of prosperity. The New Year’s tree became the embodiment of childhood joys and national pride.

Russians, who account for 39 per cent of the world’s Orthodox Christians, were allowed to celebrate Christmas once again after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. But old habits die hard and the Christmas festivities, held on January 7 in accordance with the old Julian calendar, are still overshadowed by big New Year celebrations, which are more like the Western Christmas.

The exhibition contains six sections, each explore a different theme:

1) Section one introduces the Russian New Year tradition, its history, and how it is connected to western Christmas Traditions.

2) Section two features the two main figures of Russian New Year’s, Grandfather Frost and the Snow Maiden.

3) Section three, the largest in this exhibit, explores pop-culture of the Soviet Union. The ornaments are mostly depict folklore and cartoon characters. This section also features a selection of Kolyada masks, used by children during festive New Year’s celebrations.

4) Section four delves into the Soviet propaganda machine and how it used ornaments to further its agricultural agenda, especially that of Khrushchev’s “Corn Campaign”

5) Section five further the exploration into New Year’s propaganda with ornaments featuring Red Stars, soldiers, and the children’s folk here Malchish-Kibalchish.

6) Section six closes the exhibition with a selection of ornaments that both promoted and celebrated the Soviet space program.
Booking, flexible schedule

Objects: This exhibit will include over 150 ornaments, toys, and related objects that represent the Soviet New Year Tradition. A full checklist can be provided digitally by request. The exhibition may be augmented or modified upon consultation with the Registrar.

Text: Extended wall panels and individual object labels delivered electronically

Supplemental materials: Docent/interpreter training packet, family guide, and sample press release delivered electronically

Space Requirements: Approximate minimum 150 linear feet. Cases required for all objects.

Security: A facilities report and certificate of insurance are required from each venue. Objects loaned must be displayed in secured, environmentally safe cases in locations regularly patrolled by security personnel. Mounted figures or other objects that are difficult to case may be displayed in otherwise suitable areas, provided that adequate security measures are taken. During closed hours, security by guard or electronic devices is required.

Fee: $5,000 not including shipping or insurance

Programs: Museum staff are available for staff/volunteer training, lectures, gallery talks, and other programming. Additional fees, including travel costs. Availability depends on a mutually agreeable schedule.

Contact
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